



Yom Kippur, 5780
October 8-9, 2019 — 10 Tishri 5780
When You Can't Have What She's Having
by Rabbi Wesley Gardenswartz
Temple Emanuel, Newton, MA

If you are of a certain age, you know the movie *When Harry Met Sally*, which came out 30 years ago. You know the scene. You know the line. But I found when talking to people my children's age, remarkably, they did not know the movie, did not know the scene, did not know the line. Permit me a quick recap so that we can all be on the same page.

When Harry Met Sally is a romantic comedy that came out in 1989. Harry is played by Billy Crystal and Sally by Meg Ryan. The most famous scene in the movie takes place at Katz's Deli in Manhattan. Harry and Sally are having a spirited conversation about intimacy. Sally contends that she can, shall we say, simulate bliss convincingly. Harry is dubious. Right there in the delicatessen, at her table, over her turkey and rye sandwich, with cole slaw on the side, she proceeds to do so. She is effective. Exceedingly effective. When she's done, she returns to her meal, while a diner at a nearby table tells the waiter: "*I'll have what she's having.*"

The diner who delivers that line is the director, Rob Reiner's mother, Estelle Reiner. When she died at the age of 94, the Times obituary referred to her as the woman "who delivered one of the most memorably funny lines in movie history."

I'll tell you when, where and why the scene came to me. It was in the Gann Chapel, during the middle of davening, in between mincha and maariv. We invite people who are there observing a yahrtzeit to share the name of their loved one, and to say something about them. A woman who was observing a yahrtzeit that night says: I am here to say Kaddish for my mother. Her name was Rosie. My Mom and I were so close. I talked to her every day. When she died, I didn't know whether I could ever feel joy again. And then my daughter had a daughter. And my

daughter and her husband were kind enough to call her Rosie. That is the Rosie Project. When I am with my granddaughter Rosie, I feel my mom Rosie's presence, and I feel the deepest joy again.

When I heard this woman's beautiful words, I felt two things.

I felt so happy for her. *Dor holech v'dor bah*. One generation goes, another generation comes. What a blessing to have a Rosie granddaughter be life and joy and renewal after the passing of Rosie her mother.

And then I thought of that scene in *When Harry Met Sally*. My mother was named Rosyne. Since she died three years ago, I have dreamed of having a granddaughter named Rosie. How meaningful it would be to have a granddaughter named Rosie for my late mother Rosyne. The line from the diner came to me: "I'll have what she's having."

And then it dawned on me. What happens when you don't? Or can't? Or won't? What happens when it's not happening? And when you don't have *any* control over when, or whether, it will *ever* happen?

Life is not like ordering dinner from a deli. There is no easy menu from which you get to choose. You can't always get what you want. This is all of our dilemma.

You are still single. You would love to be married. You are a bridesmaid for other brides. You are a groomsman for other grooms. But you are not the bride, and not the groom. I'll have what she's having.

You would love to start you family. Other couples are bringing children into the world. You go to somebody else's bris, somebody else's baby naming. I'll have what she's having.

Other people have so much nachus from their children. Their children are nachus machines. We love our children, of course we do. But things are much more *complicated*. I'll have what she's having.

Other couples are so in love. They are married 50, 60 years or more. Finishing each other's sentences. I'll have what she's having.

So many times in life we may be tempted to feel I'll have what she's having. Except we can't. We don't. We won't.

The funniest line in movie history can also be the hardest line in life: what happens when you *cannot* have what she's having?

Pirkei Avot *tries* to answer this question. Who is rich, Pirkei Avot asks? Answer: *hasameakh b'chelko*, the person who is happy with his lot.

There is only one problem with that. What if you are *not* happy?

If you're not happy with your lot, is there a way to *get* happy with your lot. We need a *how to* for how to *get* happy.

I want you to walk away from this sermon with three practical how to moves next time you want what she's having but realize you can't have it.

Here's the first. We may *think* we want what she's having. But the truth is you never know what is going on with another person. In the movie, it turns out that it was all an act. It wasn't real. The other diner did not know it, but Meg Ryan's character was not in fact what she appeared to be. Some version of this happens all the time.

The story is told of a person who is stopped at a red light behind another car. The light turns green. But the first car does not go. The person in the car behind the first car starts honking. When the car still does not go, more honking, and the sharing of some words and

language. At last the person in the car gets up, gets out, and goes to the back seat. There is a baby in the back seat, the driver takes out her baby, and starts hitting her on the back, to dislodge something that was stuck. The baby had been choking and was thankfully saved by her mother. *There was a baby in the back*, but the other driver could not see it and did not know it.

There is always some baby in the back, and we do not see it and do not know it. The Ted Talk Superstar Brene Brown puts it this way: Everybody you meet is fighting some battle that you know nothing about. This is not a recipe for schadenfreude, getting joy out of somebody else's suffering. But it is a recipe for not panting after what the other person has because the truth is we have *no* idea what the other person really has. This is our first how to: our job is to focus on the only thing we know and can control, our own life. If we can train ourselves to do that, that leads to the second how to.

Here is the second how to. Stay in your own lane. Run your own race. Since you are not focused on other people, you can think more deeply about what it is that you are called upon to do.

For the last several years I have been a student of Andy Stanley, an outstanding preacher of a church in Atlanta. I would have thought that becoming the preacher he is was easy and intuitive for him.

But in one sermon he talked about how intimidating it was when he was starting out in the ministry, because his father was Charles Stanley, who was one of the most prominent clergy of his generation. Years before the internet, his father's sermons were beamed on evangelical television stations to Christian communities in every country of the world, every day of the year. Every country, every day. Young Andy Stanley thought, how could I ever compete with that?

But he realized he needed to stay in his own lane, to run his own race. He realized he had a mission which was different from his father's. His father spoke to believers. But he dreamed of building a church that *unchurched* people would love to attend. He dreamed of speaking to people who were *not* believers to see if he could get them to be open to new thinking. Staying in his lane allowed him to thrive.

Rabbi Efram Goldberg, a rabbi in Florida, has a lovely turn of phrase. He says many people have FOMO. Fear of Missing Out. I'll have what she's having is driven by the fear that what she's having is better than what I am having. His challenge is to convert FOMO to JOMO, the Joy of Missing Out. When I first heard that, the Joy of Missing Out, I did a double take. How could missing out ever be a source of joy? But that is the spiritual challenge posed by JOMO. Can you be so in your own lane, not the lane of others, so running your own race, not the race of others, so in pursuit of your calling, that you genuinely do not care about what other people are doing.

First how to is: don't look at the lives of others, look at your own life.

Second how to is: turn FOMO to JOMO by staying in your lane and doing what it is that you are called upon to do.

The third how to is simply this. All of us have problems we cannot solve. How do we *manage* the problems so we cannot *solve* so that they do not define or get in the way of our life?

If anyone knows the power of managing the problems we cannot solve so that we can continue to thrive, it is Virginia Fuchs, known as Ginny, who is America's best female boxer. In 2016 at the US Olympic Trials, she twice defeated the reigning world champion. After that, she went 18-0. Her nickname on her boxing team is Seabiscuit because she is like a premier racehorse.

But her biggest opponent is not whoever steps in the ring with her. Her biggest opponent is within. She battles OCD, obsessive compulsive disorder. The focus of her illness is contamination and cleaning. As she puts it, “I’m always searching for that perfect clean feeling.” Her search for clean, in a world that is the opposite of clean, leads her to drive to Walmart three times a day to buy cleaning supplies. She trains, she boxes, she competes, at the highest level, and she manages her OCD demons, all at the same time. She fully intends to compete for our country at the Tokyo Olympics in 2020, and when she is out of the ring, she shares her story to let other athletes know that many people have inner demons, and we can manage our demons so that we can still thrive and still fulfill our promise because we manage our demons, our demons do not control us.

What do we have in our life that is not a problem to be solved but a tension to be managed? How can we manage our problem while continuing to thrive and to help others thrive? Which leads us back to *When Harry Met Sally*.

“I’ll have what she’s having” is maybe the funniest line in the history of film. But it is no way to live. The way to live is to become *sameah b’cheko*, to get happy with our own life.

Get happy by realizing that everybody has a baby in the back, that we can’t see and don’t know about, so our job is to focus on our life, not theirs.

Get happy by trading FOMO for JOMO, by running our own race, answering our own call.

Get happy by managing the problems we cannot solve so that our problems do not get in the way of our promise.

The best meal in Katz’ deli, and the best meal in life, is what is already on our own plate. *Gemar chatimah tovah*.